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Response Paper 1 “The House of Mirth”

Throughout “The House of Mirth” by Edith Wharton, one’s social status and wealth are perceived to be more important than one’s happiness. In this book, we have read about people using their looks, wealth, prestige, and status to get where they are, what they want, and want to be. During this time frame, early 1900s, people were more concern about their social status and getting married to have security in their lives. In part two of the book chapters 1- 4, Lily Bart’s reputation is going down “hill” after being accused of having an affair with George Dorset by his wife, Bertha, in an attempt to keep Bertha’s affair with Ned Silverman behind closed doors.

Starting from the beginning of the book we have read about how beauty, status, and wealth are emphasized in the social elite group. Most of the characters have been in multiple failed relationships or remarried again in order to remain in their social group. For example, Lily Bart is on a mission to find herself a husband that is in the social elite and can take care of her, by using her beauty. That way she can remain in the social elite and want end up like Gerty Farish, who Lily believes is “good, but not happy” and “unmarriageable” (Wharton 6). According to the book, Lily said “I threw away one or two good chances when I first came out— I suppose every girl does; and you know I am horribly poor— and very expensive. I must have a great deal of money” (Wharton 9). In other words, she basically wants to be a trophy wife.

During this time frame, marriage was one of the ways women and men gain their social status and security, if anything were to happen. Throughout this book hardly any characters married their spouse out of genuine love and happiness, but instead for stability and security. Is having a secured living situation and financial background more important than being happy throughout one’s life? In my opinion the answer is no. Take Bertha Dorset infidelity for instance; pretend that Miss Bart is happy with her life. The way Bertha manipulated and used Lily to cover up her affair with Silverman implies that she only care about herself and ruining Lily’s reputation. Also, that there was some marriage issues happening between George and her. Instead of her talking to her husband, she found someone within the same social elite to make sure she’s secured again.

In conclusion, finding happiness within this social elite group is very difficult. Almost everyone in this group is not content with themselves. For the most part, they use their prestige, wealth, and/or looks to get what they want. For instance, Lily’s mother gave her the impression that she can use her beauty to marry, and find security and happiness, which is a fault. Finding happiness inside one’s life takes time and patience. Just because a person has the social status and wealth doesn’t mean, he have “Happiness.”